Radical Grace and the Economy

Overview

- This is an overview of a Workbook on how mainstream economics makes fundamental value judgments which violate key spiritual values.
  - It contains nine Modules discussing how the foundations of economics rest on assertions which are not amenable to people of the spirit.
  - And it discusses how applying deeper values — drawn from the insights of Franciscan and Indigenous economics — can move us toward an economy of spirit.

Modules:

Overview
I. Denial of Grace
II. Denial of Vocation
III. Denial of Abundance
IV. Denial of Community
V. Denial of the Individual
VI. Denial of the Humble
VII. Denial of Justice
VIII. Denial of Mother Earth
IX. Denial of Entitlement

The Nine Discussion Modules

I. Denial of Grace

- Conventional economics has no concept of grace. It knows only fair trade — give as much as you get.
    - This is entirely transactional in nature. Fair trade is its highest aspiration, which offers nothing without taking something else back.
- An economy of the spirit lives by grace.
    - Don't give as much as you get. Just give. Period. For the sake of giving.
- In an environment of generosity, when all are in giving mode, everyone's needs would be met through basic caring and gratuitous spirit.
- Is that a pipe dream?

II. Denial of Vocation

- Conventional economics asserts that the central fact of life is scarcity. There's not enough to meet all our insatiable wants.
    - It draws our aspirations away from vocation and service, in favour of empty consumption.
    - In this view, service is just work, endured only to obtain consumption.
- In an economy of the spirit the vocation of service is a sacred endeavour.
    - Yet we have to consume to meet basic needs.
    - Your vocation may call you to limit your consumption to give you what you need in pursuit of a higher purpose.
- Is that too demanding?

III. Denial of Abundance

- Conventional economics asserts that the central fact of life is scarcity.
    - There's not enough to meet all our insatiable wants.
    - So we need the magic of the market to ration it out for us.
- An economy of the spirit disputes that:
    - Unlimited wants are not a good thing.
    - Unlimited consumption is not a good thing.
    - And nature's abundance is more than enough to meet our finite needs.
- Needs come before wants.

IV. Denial of Community

- Conventional economics is intensely individualist.
    - It claims that all desires arise from deep inside each separate mind.
    - Its market model imagines we can put fragmented individuals together in a utopia of individual transactions in perfect harmony.
- An economy of the spirit recognizes that we're steeped in community from the very start.
    - We are shaped by our community down to the very language we speak.
    - We need to balance the needs of our sacred community with the needs of individual self-expression.
- Have we lost our balance?

V. Denial of the Individual

- Conventional economics denies true individuality.
    - Its paradigm offers only a meaningless drive for satisfaction.
    - It leaves the individual an empty shell. An individual with no content is nothing.
    - It claims that the poor are the authors of their own demise by failing to utilize the resources of the free market to improve their lot.
- An economy of spirit will give individuals the means to express their true selves.
    - Which can be found only in their mission in partnership with the Creator.
    - At the same time, we all have a little of the empty false self within us, so the challenge is real.
- Who is your true self?

VI. Denial of the Humble

- Conventional economics glorifies and empowers those who are overly-entitled and those who are well-endowed with material possessions.
    - It claims that the poor are the authors of their own demise by failing to utilize the resources of the free market to improve their lot.
    - Conventional economics claims that justice is not a matter of concern because a truly competitive market automatically balances everything, ensuring that everyone gets what they deserve.
- An economy of grace recognizes that many of the marginalized and the broken are those who do not possess the grasping and aggressive nature often needed to thrive in the market arena.
    - We should give priority to ensuring that those at the bottom receive the resources they need to discern their calling and pursue their mission in life.
    - Let the well-endowed stand in line for a change.
- Will you flip society upside-down?

VII. Denial of Justice

- Conventional economics claims that justice is not a matter of concern because a truly competitive market automatically balances everything, ensuring that everyone gets what they deserve.
    - In this view, social justice is a collateral benefit of individual market choices. If injustices arise out of market imperfections, we just need to make the market more perfect and it will fix itself.
- An economy of grace recognizes that there's no such automatic fix. Justice is a community project.
    - It is found where people accommodate each other's needs in loving interdependence, and where a sensitivity to each other's well-being inspires them to ensure that nobody is denied the resources to live in dignity.
- But can we just jettison the market?

VIII. Denial of Mother Earth

- Conventional economics considers the planet to be no more than a pile of resources waiting to be exploited by humans as if we stood outside of it.
    - Could we do it sustainably? We'd still be stripping the planet of its resources without reciprocity. And the growth imperative will stand in the way.
- An economy of grace recognizes that the land is family.
    - We are commissioned by God to care for Mother Earth, build a relationship of mutual nurturing.
    - And to honour all our relations who live in the land, sea or sky in full respect for all forms of life.
- Do we know how to nurture creation?

IX. Denial of Entitlement

- Everyone is entitled to a place to call home, a community to call family, a role in which to live one's calling with dignity, the means to rise to life's challenges, and a path to the spirit which gives us life.
    - But in the market culture of recent centuries, only commodities matter and power rules. Everything is up for grabs. Every sacred entitlement can be stolen and colonized by the forces of money or might.
- People of grace stand opposed to colonization at all its forms historical and modern.
    - These include appropriating the land of nature's children, cancelling communities and cultures, imposing roles and identities, and corrupting the spirit.
- It's not just the land grab.

This Workbook critiques Mainstream Economics.

- While that covers a wide range of issues and perspectives, it's rooted in a core model of how the economy works.

- What is Mainstream Economics?
  - Mainstream Economics is an imaginary scale model of an economy where individuals pursue their narrow self-interests in an environment of free market competition.
  - Believers of this idealistic model claim that it results in perfect justice and perfect consumer satisfaction — as long as government interferes with it as little as possible.
  - Instances are acknowledged where the market doesn't do this job well — but these are just imperfections in the market that can be fixed up with better markets and properly limited government.

- There are "heterodox" economists who question the core model, claiming it's too narrow in its perfect competition and in its hard core individualism:
  - Holding goods in common is just as rational and efficient as trading them.
  - Humanity has evolved to be social animals not isolated individuals.
  - Utilitarianism is a philosophical dinosaur.
  - Competition is often more predatory than benevolent.
  - Evolution is a better model than equilibrium.

- While considering all those critiques important – here we critique the model in other terms, namely …
  - Generosity
  - Calling
  - Morality
  - Inclusion.

- Many dismiss these criteria as being beyond the traditional bounds of economics
  - Yet they shape its very core.

- Hence we focus on the narrowest of the models — not only because there we can pinpoint these moral failings — but also because so many policy regimes around the world follow the mainstream model.

Module I. Denial of Grace

Grace in a Transactional World

The nature of grace in contrast with transactional relations.

Issues

- *Grace is Generous*
  - Giving until the needs of others are met.
- *Grace is Love*
  - Meeting the needs of others without demands.
- *Grace is Not Transactional*
  - Don't give as much as you get — just give — with no thought of whether it's deserved or reciprocated, simply because everyone needs someone to care.

Discussion Questions

1. *What's wrong with being transactional?* Isn't that normal? What is fair trade? Isn't it a good thing?
2. *How is grace different from transaction?* How essential is it? How many people live that way?
3. *Can grace ever become the norm?* Are we too corrupted by our society, by a lifetime of stunted notions of what's proper, to change?

Finding the Balance

The practicality of grace in a transactional culture.

Issues

- *Culture of Grace*
  - In a culture of universal grace, everyone gives freely and generously, so that everyone gets what they need.
- *The Practicalities*
  - When all are not in giving mode, some people may get left out. Sometimes fair trade may be the best we can do.
- *Finding a Balance*
  - In modern life, we need to seek a balance between transaction and grace.
  - Perhaps impersonal market relations can coexist alongside loving community relations. But we live in a hardcore transactional society where grace is downplayed as a deviation from the norm.

Discussion Questions

1. *In an economy where everyone is giving* without thought of return workable in practice? Does that exist anywhere?
2. *If you're in giving mode* and everyone else is in taking mode, will you survive? Was Christ being naïve?
3. *If we want more grace in our society*, but we're fully transactional in our daily lives, how can we really move people in that direction?

Reciprocity in a Transactional World

Subtle differences between exchange and reciprocity.

Issues

- *A Softer Approach*
  - There's a softer approach to fairness that can apply loving grace to the interactions of exchange — called reciprocity.
  - Reciprocity is a broader concept, referring to any exchange that meets the needs of both parties, by whatever means — maybe using money, maybe not — maybe equal, maybe nobody's counting.
- *Unequal is Equal*
  - Reciprocity allows for exchange that's not equal monetarily — exchange which may include unmeasurable gestures of love and caring that can't be reduced to dollars — like parents feeding their families or one friend doing an unexpected favour for another.
- *Balanced in Other Ways*
  - Reciprocal exchange may be unequal in money terms because it's balanced in other ways — balanced by some generosity of support and caring that can't be measured in dollars. Or maybe it's not balanced at all — offering mutual support in a generosity of spirit, but who's counting? This broader meaning of the word "reciprocity" is not always understood.

Discussion Questions

1. *How is reciprocity different from equal exchange?* Where do we see it in practice?
2. *When is it appropriate to give less* in money terms than you received? When is it noble? Does that make fair trade irrelevant?
3. *Where have you seen unmetered reciprocity* in your life — an example in your life where money exchange was unequal or absent, but reciprocity was present?

Franciscans in a Profane World

The balancing act of the Franciscan Order offering grace in an indifferent society.

Issues

- *Francis Stepped Out*
  - Eight centuries ago, Francis of Assisi stepped out of the wealth-revering society of his time, and turned toward the wealth-deploring values of Christ. In the early days he rejected all kinds of commercial relations. Transactional relations of any kind were viewed as a flight from grace.
- *Francis Stayed In*
  - But Francis also opted to remain in the world and in the church, where people have to come to terms with society.
- *Pockets of Grace*
  - Over the centuries, the Franciscan Orders evolved into Pockets of Grace in a profane world, whose mission was to reach out to society in healing ways.
- *On the Margins*
  - Today, their profession is to offer grace to people on the margins of society without asking whether they deserve it. Gratuitous living and mutual support are are in their bones. Their service to others is unbalanced and unmetered — feeding the hungry and crying for justice.

Discussion Questions

1. *If Franciscans wish to live in grace*, how do they get along with such a transactional society? Are Pockets of Grace enough to heal the culture?
2. *Is it enough to be generous to the marginalized?* Is the cry for justice an essential part of grace?
3. *Where do you see Pockets of Grace* in society?

Indigenous and Gratuitous

Indigenous culture views creation with a generosity toward “all my relations”.

Issues

- *Excluded*
  - Indigenous people were not really integrated into the fragmented culture of settler society. They were not involved when Europeans abandoned all things spiritual and called it *The Enlightenment*. The sterility of equivalent exchange never fully took hold.
- *Native Gratuitousness*
  - They still retain a native gratuitousness among “all our relations” — which extends to all of creation. The ideal of unbalanced and unmetered generosity has fertile ground within indigenous communities, and it’s finding greater revival the more colonialism is challenged.
  - Living in a transactional world not of their own making, they understand well the deeper concept of reciprocity.

Discussion Questions

1. *When they pay tribute to “all our relations”*, how are they extending reciprocity to all of creation? How can market relations never do that?
2. *Can the native gratuitousness of indigenous culture* simply be transferred over to a colonial society? Are they just out of place in mainstream society, or can they take a leading role?

Challenging a Transactional Culture

Cultural obstacles to greater reciprocity and grace.

Issues

- *Stacked Against Us*
  - Our culture is stacked against us. To score a good deal in transactional society is the default mindset of the average citizen — for whom equal exchange is the highest virtue.
- *Fails Scrutiny*
  - But this ideal does not stand up to scrutiny. Fair market exchange often falls short of meeting people's needs. The deeper problem is that equal market exchange often occurs at the expense of those deeper relations of reciprocity where love can outweigh the market.

Discussion Questions

1. *How do we tell people that fair trade is not enough* to meet our needs? How do we tap into people's gut understanding of true reciprocity and contrast that with the myths of trade? How do we draw out people's discontent with the shallow relationships of market culture?
2. *What needs do you have that are not traded* in the marketplace? How do you get them met?

Challenging Public Policy

Seeking an economy of grace.

Issues

- *Challenge Priorities*
  - We need also challenge those public priorities that misdirect the greatest incentives and advantages — monetary, institutional and legal advantages — toward market ventures. The soft economy of grace and reciprocity is left out of the loop.
- *Redirect Resources*
  - Government largesse needs to be reconfigured to give adequate resources to non-commercial commitments such as caregiving and all those nurturing activities that make life meaningful and loving — but are not marketable.
- *Guaranteed Income*
  - This needs to be backed up by alternative forms of income not tied to marketed activities — such as a system of universal guaranteed income.

Discussion Questions

1. *How can public policy determine the needs of people* engaged in activities that have no market value? How can society allocate resources between marketable and non-marketable activities?
2. *Where should government largesse be directed* instead of upwards? To whom?
3. *How much guaranteed income would be enough* for you to support yourself and follow your calling? How would you make the best use of it? Or would you just sit back and do nothing?

Module II. Denial of Vocation

Consumption vs Vocation

Living on purpose has been replaced with empty consumption.

Issues

- *Consumption is Everything*
    - Conventional economics draws our aspirations away from vocation and service, in favour of empty consumption.
    - In this view, service is just work, endured only to obtain money for consumption goods.
    - Consumption brings satisfaction — or “utility” — and work is merely a “disutility”. Where is your “calling” in that dismal view?
- *Looking Outward*
    - People of the spirit look outward with a focus on what they can offer to others.
    - They seek relationship with their neighbours, family and community.
    - They desire to serve — to interact creatively in support of the sisters and brothers in their lives.
    - They have a purpose or a vocation or a calling in their lives.

Discussion Questions

1. *How has the ethic of consumption* conquered the ethic of vocation?
2. *How do we persuade* people to serve, not just consume?
3. *Does everyone have a unique calling?* Do you? How many people even know?

Consumerism vs Resources

Consumerism can overwhelm our means.

Issues

- *Rampant consumerism*
  - We live in an economy of rampant consumerism, inward looking, seeking only personal commodity satisfaction or “utility”.
- *Prevalent and Addictive*
  - Consumerism is prevalent and addictive, fed by a powerful marketing industry. It’s designed to generate unlimited demand which can never be met.
- *Overwhelming*
  - The resources of Mother Earth — sufficient to meet everyone’s needs but not everyone’s greed — are overwhelmed by an avalanche of demand.

Discussion Questions

1. *Are we really sitting ducks? Has the marketing industry really turned us all into consumption junkies? How do we fight an addiction to consumption itself? Who do we fight?*
2. *Why are people so willing to accept that spiralling demand is no big problem for the economy — for society — for the ecology? Or is it still manageable?*
3. *Can people really turn the corner? Can a culture ruined by consumerism turn around?*

Consumerism vs Calling

Consumption for better or for worse.

Issues

- *Consumerism is Vulnerable*
  - It has its Achilles' Heel. Consumption for its own sake is meaningless. Consumption junkies run away from its emptiness by means of more consumption — a futile gesture which spirals into nothingness.
- *Consumerism is Futile*
  - Discerning people realize that. Fulfilment arises out of doing — acting in pursuit of one's purpose — not out of taking. The best response to consumerism is to discern that one has a calling — leading one to realize that greater joy can be found in less consumption.
- *But Consumption is Necessary*
  - We can't tell someone who doesn't know where their next meal is coming from that consumption is bad. "You rich people can't just tell us to stop consuming — just because you feel guilty about making pigs of yourselves." There's a line between necessary consumption and excess consumption.

Discussion Questions

1. *Are people content to consume endlessly?* Do they know it's an empty life? Do they feel any discontent? How can we reach them? How can we turn the conversation toward calling?
2. *Where do we draw the line?* How do we oppose the disorder of consumerism when there are so many people deprived of consumer goods? How can we ask the hungry to consume less?
3. *How deep are you into consumer culture?* Are you addicted to your smartphone? How discontented are you?

Franciscans are Called

Calling for a new way of living.

Issues

- *Rooted in Calling*
  - Franciscan dedication to simple living governed by needs alone is a call to repudiate consumerism, in order to be totally immersed in their vocation of service. Less is more.
- *Recognize True Fulfillment*
  - Greater fulfillment comes when one shares what one does not truly need, and maybe a touch more. Self-indulgence and acquisitiveness crowd out God and self-denial is a cleansing that nurtures spiritual health.

Discussion Questions

1. *How can less consumption* be more satisfying?
2. *How many people are open to the idea* that self-denial is cleansing and self-fulfilling?
3. *Is simplicity enough?* Franciscans commit to live simple lives. This is popular in some secular circles. Is that the same thing? Are they allies?
4. *How do you strive for a simple life* in your own calling?

Indigenous on a Different Path

The acquisitive lifestyle is foreign to them.

Issues

- *Not so Obsessed with Consumption*
  - Indigenous people do not resonate naturally with consumerism. To be one with the Creator calls on them to refrain from acquisitive behaviour. Tradition teaches them to take only what they need and use all of it.
- *Decry Overconsumption*
  - They embrace natural or even sparse living — in order to focus on tending to the needs of “all our relations”.
- *Seek Harmony*
  - They seek harmony with the creator and the land, and sense that self-indulgence is out of sync with creation.

Discussion Questions

1. *Can indigenous counter-culture help us* confront predatory consumerism? How?
2. *How does natural living lead us to respect the needs of “all our relations”*
3. *How is self-indulgence out of sync with creation?*

Reframing Consumerism

Digging deeper is revolutionary.

Issues

- *Challenging the Juggernaut*
  - A more spiritual stance cries out for challenging the juggernaut of hothouse consumerism. All the incentives of our economy direct us powerfully toward self-indulgence.
- *Encouraging a Counter-culture*
  - A spiritual stance calls for a re-orientation, directed at those who might respond to the deeper things in life. And it calls for a debunking of the growth mantra as a spiritual corruption that preaches salvation through affluence.
- *Revolution of the Spirit*
  - Change lies in a revolution of the spirit that turns hearts and minds toward one's sacred calling — a revolution of re-framing that challenges a culture of mass self-indulgence and awakens a drive to service.

Discussion Questions

1. *Can we take on an obsessive consumerism and self-indulgence* and win the battle? Can we pull off a revolution of the spirit, or are the affluence junkies too far gone to change?
2. *Where do we find those people* who are on the fence, uncomfortable with their affluence, and who might question what they've been told and respond to the deeper issues?
3. Are *you part of the counter-culture?* How can you help create new sensibilities in society?

Dethroning GDP

GDP growth has got to go.

Issues

- *GDP Has Got to Go*
  - The path of change also lies in dethroning GDP, the most deceptive possible measure of public welfare, as a public policy goal. Public policy must stop favouring the life of pursuing affluence and support those who would live a modest vocation.
- *A Huge Turnaround*
  - That's a huge turnaround in a society that worships material growth — and great reluctance can be expected.
- *A Financial Turnaround Too*
  - A key step is to redirect the massive subsidies and incentives that prop up the commercial ethic — to support instead those endeavours that address public needs above empire building. This is a call to reallocate public resources and incentives to those who would serve others gratuitously. Radical grace demands no less.

Discussion Questions

1. *Can GDP growth ever be dethroned* when it's been pushed down our throats from day one? Can a population programmed from the start to consume endlessly ever develop a passion for modest vocation?
2. *Can government generosity toward financial empires actually be redirected* toward community priorities without pushback? From whom? How much of a fight do we have on our hands?
3. *Why have you not been programmed to worship growth?* Or have you? How do you take a stand in opposition to unconstrained GDP growth?

Module III. Denial of Abundance

Selling our Souls

Flooded with scarcity.

Issues

- *We have it all*
  - If our grandparents could have imagined the extravagant wealth of commodities, conveniences and excitement that so many of us take for granted today — they'd scarcely believe such a blissful fantasy world could exist.
- *We Don't Have Enough*
  - But if we could tell them that our modern lives are plagued by a nagging scarcity that renders us constantly dissatisfied and clamouring for more — they'd think we've lost our minds, indeed our souls. Perhaps we have.

Discussion Questions

1. *Why does a society that's learned to create wealth like never before* feel that they're falling behind and can never get all they want? What's keeping it from them? So have we lost our souls?
2. *Isn't scarcity a fact of life?* Isn't it hopelessly idealistic to say we live in abundance?
3. *Do you chase affluence less* than most other people?

Insatiable Creatures

The role of scarcity in society and its denial of abundance.

Issues

- *Scarcity is a Fact of Life*
  - In this age, scarcity is presented to us as simply a fact of life. We're taught to believe that human beings are insatiable consumers, that we live only to satisfy our infinite wants but we live in a finite world. So scarcity is considered inevitable.
- *Abundance is a Fantasy*
  - Its opposite — abundance — is seen as a fantasy. When life is constant grasping in a fixed environment, there's no place for abundance. God's bountiful creation has no meaning in this dark view

Discussion Questions

1. *Are humans really insatiable?* Have we been programmed like robots to be grasping and dissatisfied? Or is it just human nature to always want more?
2. *Is scarcity inevitable?* How can we get ourselves out of a scarcity mindset? Or are we too far gone?
3. *How can we say there's no scarcity* when people are starving?
4. *To what extent do you live* within God's abundance? Isn't there something you never get enough of?

The Limits of Consumption

Empty consumption, needs and wants, purpose in life.

Issues

- *Consumption to What End?*
  - There's a problem with the simplistic ideology of scarcity. Something's been left out of the equation — purpose. To consume endlessly is not a human purpose. To chase satisfaction for no goal beyond chasing even more satisfaction is the way of lower life forms. Humanity is capable of seeking a much higher purpose.
- *Needs vs Wants*
  - Yes we need to consume for the sustenance we need to pursue our calling. But there are two sides to consumption. One, consumption for its own sake is empty. Two, consuming enough to meet our needs, not to indulge our wants, can be managed with the abundance God has given us.
- *Reach Out and Serve*
  - People of the spirit recognize that infinite wants are an aberration of the human soul. The purpose of life is not to take in as much as possible. Rather it is to reach out and give oneself over to that greater purpose — to serve others and show them grace — taking in only what we need in order to reach out.

Discussion Questions

1. *What makes consumption good or bad?* How much do you really need to consume to follow your calling?
2. *Is nature's bounty really enough* for all of us?
3. *Is it placing undue limits on the human imagination* to stop them from wanting more?
4. *How much do you live out the scarcity narrative?* Do you take in only what you need? What do you need it for?

Franciscan Joy of Self-Denial

The burden of self-indulgence and the liberating path.

Issues

- *Self-Denial is a Gift*
  - A prominent component of the *Franciscan Rule of Life* is self-denial. That's not just a masochistic dictate to deprive yourself of things that give you satisfaction. Rather it means to cast aside those empty wants that blind you to your deeper potential and live by your primary needs.
- *It Opens the Path to God*
  - It is to get rid of excess baggage and noise in your life so you can hear your calling. It's the joy of being on an enlightened path without tripping over all your possessions. It's a life of gratitude for the blessing of taking little from God's abundance.

Discussion Questions

1. *How big a stretch is it* to convince people of the joy of self-denial? How do we explain it?
2. *Can we start by telling them* that self-indulgence is unhealthy and stifling? Or should we emphasize that nothing is truly satisfying but living one's calling?
3. *Do you personally understand* the joy of self-denial?

Indigenous Abundance

The indigenous relationship with creation and appreciation of her abundance.

Issues

- *Healthy Relationship*
  - Indigenous culture is to live in healthy relationship with creation. To merely extract all you want out of the Creator's body until it's depleted is disrespectful and profane.
- *Scarcity a Poor Fit*
  - There's no scarcity in a healthy give-and-take with the Creator's world. Indigenous symbiotic culture is very much to live with the abundance we have, taking for oneself as little as practicable from Mother Earth and her children, and being thankful for that. To scramble for more is to create scarcity, an anti-social act.

Discussion Questions

1. *The indigenous approach, of nurturing all of creation*, is greatly at odds with mainstream culture of taking all one can get for oneself. How can we reconcile these perspectives?
2. *Have you ever advocated an indigenous approach* — to take as little as you can from our Mother Earth and her children and give thanks for the privilege?

Going Against the Flow

The task of changing the conversation.

Issues

- *Cultural Pressure*
    - The constant pressure to consume more and more, coming from an all-powerful marketing industry throughout one's life, makes people vulnerable to the suggestion that that there's never enough and scarcity is life. Abundance is unrealistic. Unsatisfied wants are everything.
- *Bucking the System*
    - Living to meet one's needs, which are finite and stable, is not on the modern agenda. Our social task — a tall order — is to change that agenda.

Discussion Questions

1. *How do we de-programme people* and help them conquer their addiction to obsessive consumption?
2. *How do we neutralize* the all-powerful marketing industry?
3. *How do you personally defy* the marketing industry and persuade others to follow a different path?

Creating a Different Flow

Creation of a movement to build a better life.

Issues

- *The Dissatisfaction is There*
    - There exists in modern times an advance guard of people who have a nagging suspicion that spiralling affluence is an empty way of life, and who are responsive to the call for a better quality of life. There are those who worry that chasing scarcity in an upward spiral of acquisition and consumption is putting unbearable stress on the environment. Even self-denial is coming to be seen in a positive light, by a growing number of people who espouse simplicity in life.
- *Seeking a Sub-Culture*
    - A prospect of living within God's abundance, cultivating modest needs and rejecting excess, and defying that social conditioning that creates scarcity out of greed — raises the hope that a sub-culture can be cultivated.

Discussion Questions

1. *Where would you look for people on the fence* about consumer culture? What do we have in common with them? How can we work with them?
2. *How do we talk to people who can't resonate* with obsessive consumption, who are already looking for answers, but who don't know the Spirit?

Dethroning the Marketers

Freeing ourselves from the programming of the marketing industry.

Issues

- *Time for a Reset*
  - A society that scrambles for more, more and more commodities as if they're slipping from our grasp — prodded by an all-powerful marketing industry that uses every psychological trick in the book to keep us constantly dissatisfied — has got to go.
- *Confronting a Marketing Monolith*
  - Marketing needs to lose its grip on the public imagination as well as lose its economic privileges. Government largesse is better directed to incentives that favour less grasping activities and initiatives, and encourage simpler living.

Discussion Questions

1. *How on earth can we loosen the grip* of the marketing industry? Does it take draconian regulations? Does it take removing big subsidies they should never have had in the first place?
2. *Where should society redirect* the money?
3. *Do you think the marketing culture* can really be changed?

IV . Denial of Community

Seeking Equilibrium

The extreme individualist stance of economic models
vs the balanced approach necessary to live rationally.

Issues

- *Obsessively Individualist*
  - Mainstream economic models are firmly individualist. They claim that all desires arise from inside the individual mind, uncreated and separate from other individual minds.
- *Denial of Community*
  - In such models, there's no such thing as community. Just individuals. But that defies our life experience, where we're normally brought up in families and learn through intense interaction the language of living in relation to each other. The choices we make are as much a response to community relationships as they are to individual impulse.
- Seeking a Balance
  - A healthy person strives for a balance — between actively caring for the well-being of family and community and seeking personal fulfillment of one's own individual goals.

Discussion Questions

1. *How can anyone make the assumption* that only individuals exist? Or do people do that unconsciously? How do you respond to the claim that there's no such thing as community?
2. *How did it come to pass* that so many people value nothing but individual freedom? How do we instil in them the need to balance their individual choices with their responsibility to the community?

Business in Community

The intermediary role that responsible business can play.

Issues

- *Fable Doesn't Ring True*
  - Individual businesses dealing with individual consumers does not a community make. Only in economic mythology does free competition in the marketplace turn a pack of self-seeking individuals into an actual community.
- *Business and Community*
  - But many business people don't fit into that narrow image. There's no shortage of generous and compassionate business people who temper their business interests with a deep caring for their community. Those in the business community who are immersed in the people they serve are an essential part of society's balance.

Discussion Questions

1. *There are many businesses that strive to serve* the community. How do they serve community and profit at the same time? When it works, why does it work?
2. *How has an ideology that reduces people* to unconnected individuals get such a grip on our culture, when it should be so obvious that we're steeped in community from day one?
3. *How do you deal with people who recognize only* their own individuality and dismiss community responsibility as oppressive?

A Franciscan Balance

The alternative balance of individual and community exhibited among Franciscans.

Issues

- *The Call for Grace and Balance*
  - People of the spirit know that the soul must be in balance. There's a place for individual expression and there's a place for communities of grace. Spiritual traditions around the world seek a proper balancing of individual pursuits with the interconnectedness of everything.
- *The Franciscan Response*
  - The Franciscan Order calls on members to temper their individual impulses with enough self-restraint to place their chief focus on service to the community. This merges with the Franciscan vocation of showing grace to the marginalized.

Discussion Questions

1. *Does Franciscan "self-denial" really mean* to lose yourself in the community, or is it really to find yourself? What new and different kind of balance does it represent?
2. *How do you personally strike that balance* between individual freedom and responsibility to community?

We are All Family

The family and community orientation among Indigenous people.

Issues

- *We are All Family*
  - Indigenous people direct their loving and caring to the largest family of all — from kin, to community, to creatures of all kinds, to Mother Earth, to the Great Spirit. “We are all family.”
- *Living in Community*
  - One who puts individual interests above the larger community is a broken spirit in need of healing. Not that individual expression is absent. But it’s healthy when it seeks harmony and balance — harmony with creation and balance of interests. It’s a stark contrast with the competitive equilibrium of colonial culture.

Discussion Questions

1. *The Indigenous Potlatch* — an elaborate celebration where leaders freely gave away possessions to those who had little — was outlawed for many decades in Canada. Why do you think the colonial authorities did that? What did it violate? What did it threaten?
2. *How do you personally seek that one-ness* up the chain of being— from yourself to kin to community to all creatures to Mother Earth to the Great Spirit?

Challenging the Conventional Wisdom

The need to renew our old community sensibilities.

Issues

- *Hard Core Individualism*
  - Resurrecting community in the public mind is where conventional wisdom needs to be challenged. Hard core individualism — which claims that only atomistic individuals exist and community is just an abstraction — has been drilled into the minds of uncountable generations since “The Enlightenment”.
- *Re-Education*
  - People need to be educated about the need to balance individual autonomy against community values — to reveal the meaningless of disconnected individualism and awaken them to the importance of community in all our lives.

Discussion Questions

1. *How does mainstream culture make it difficult* for us to get across the primacy of community in all our lives? How will they push back? What can we do to broaden that perspective
2. *Where in that balance* — between an autonomous individual and a member of a community — do you personally lie?

Redirecting Priorities

The need for a radical policy shift.

Issues

- *Turned on its Head*
  - Economic policy needs to be turned on its head. It's based on the presumption that helping individuals and private corporations maximize their private gains will allow the market to work its magic.
- *Corporate Welfare*
  - Since that works only in theory, government steps in to prop up private gains with legal privileges and subsidies. Community endeavour is left to fend for itself.
- *Help the Right People*
  - The alternative is to redirect government support, the largesse that currently flows to the corporate sector — redirect it toward the cooperative and small-business sectors that are currently left with the crumbs under the corporate table.

Discussion Questions

1. *If the public just takes it for granted* that corporations must be given first privileges in our economy in order for them to create jobs, how do we argue that community and small business enterprise should be given that priority? How do we make that message credible to a well-programmed population?
2. *Can you see a future* when government largesse flows downward instead of upward? Is that viable?

Module V. Denial of the Individual

Individual without Community

The emptiness of “economic man”.

Issues

- *Individuals in Community*
  - Normally, we’re deeply imbedded in family — from kin to community to creatures to ecology to spirit. At the same time we’re individuals, each expressing that deep interconnectedness in our own unique way. Such is the spark and balance of life.
- *Denying our Connectedness*
  - By attempting to take that interconnectedness out of life — proclaiming a radical individualism — economic ideology is divorcing us from the communities that nourish our uniqueness. All that’s left is an empty shell called “economic man” who seeks nothing but personal gain with no interest in anything or anyone else.

Discussion Questions

1. *British PM Margaret Thatcher once said*, “There is no such thing as society, only individuals”. How would you reply?
2. *Has there ever been a society* of radical individuals like economists imagine? Is it possible to have such a society?

Finding the True Self

The meaning of self.

Issues

- *False Self, True Self*
  - Empty individuality without substance detracts from true individuality — contributing one's uniqueness to something greater than oneself.
- *Emptiness is Unsatisfying*
  - Individuals may be distracted by constant gratification, but they're not fully comfortable with emptiness.
- *Individuals Seek Meaning in the Divine*
  - People of the spirit seek meaning in life through forms of individual expression that connect them with their community and with the divine. They reject any idea that self-gratification can give meaning to life.

Discussion Questions

1. *Is it a contradiction* that radical individualism robs us of our true individuality?
2. *Are people really discontented* with the empty life when it offers constant gratification?
3. *What's the distinction* — from scholars like Thomas Merton and Richard Rohr — between the false self and the true self? If you haven't read them, take a guess. How much do you live your true self?

Joy of the Greater Self

The nature of the true self.

Issues

- *Self-Gratification Detracts*
  - Franciscans feel that individual self-gratification detracts from their devotion to serving God's children, and is indeed a flight from God.
- *Self-Denial Rules*
  - They follow a Rule of Life calls that calls for self-denial — because it clears away distractions that get in the way of living in God's presence.
- *Service is Their Self-Expression*
  - They call for dedication to serving the community and beyond, especially the marginalized and broken. This is seen as the only true self-expression.

Discussion Questions

1. *Why is self-gratification* a flight from God?
2. *In what sense does self-expression* lie in self- denial? What do you gain when you lose your self- indulgent self?
3. *Is service to others sacrificing yourself*, or is it finding yourself? Why?

Creatures of Community

How indigenous people view the self.

Issues

- *Seeking Balance*
  - Indigenous people seek a balance between healthy community and individual aspirations — viewing behaviour that's too self-serving as a disorder — and viewing individuals who find creative and unique ways to serve the community as noble.
- *Valuing Generosity*
  - Generosity is a high virtue and a high aspiration, and it's not unusual to share one's belongings with others in the community who need them more. They have many ways of blending individual generosity with community solidarity. Balance is the key.

Discussion Questions

1. *If self-serving behaviour is acceptable* in one branch of society, and not present in another, how can we reconcile those opposing values?
2. *How is the well-being of your community* the highest expression of your individual self?

Confronting the Ideology

How a long-ingrained individualism may be undermined.

Issues

- *Debunking the Canon*
  - A narrowly-conceived individualism has been drummed into many generations of western minds. It has convinced many that fulfillment can be found by ignoring the community and defying its spirit. But we're immersed in community, nourished by community. The only true individuality is to express — each in one's own unique way — the gifts that kin, community, creatures, nature and spirit have given us.
- *Taking the Long View*
  - An indigenous approach is to work for change seven generations down the road. Plant seeds for a different way of living in the future as unique members of God's creation. That calls for an agenda that's subversive and disruptive and patient, yet requires a community to bring it about.
- *And Showing the Way*
  - It also calls on us to show the way — to live the life that brings together each of our unique contributions to the well-being of creation and community — and show how that is a life of love and reconciliation and service.

Discussion Questions

1. *How can we be unique individuals* and creatures of community at the same time?
2. *Is a life of love and reconciliation and service* too hard a sell in such a self-indulgent society?
3. *How do you choose to be subversive?* How counter- cultural are you? How much have you been able to break away from the dominant narrative?

Module VI. Denial of the Humble

Turning on its Head

The revolutionary stance of Christian origins.

Issues

- *Flipping the Order*
  - Christ's people were the downtrodden, the oppressed and the marginalized — to whom he told us to give a clear preference. Indeed, he counsels flipping the order of social ranking. "The last shall be first and the first shall be last."
- *Flipping the Values*
  - Attributes valued and rewarded least in the world — meekness and humility — are the attributes valued most highly in God's Kingdom.

Discussion Questions

1. *Does anyone really believe* that the marginalized, those at the bottom, are the most deserving people? Is modern society not revolted by that suggestion?
2. *Should the social ranking really be flipped* completely? Would it work? What might be the first steps in that direction? How far can we take it?

Blaming the Marginalized

Those at the bottom should be honoured not marginalized.

Issues

- *Glorifying the Well-Endowed*
  - Conventional economics glorifies and empowers those who are privileged and endowed with material possessions.
- *Blaming the Poor*
  - It claims that the poor are the authors of their own demise by failing to utilize the resources of the free market to improve their lot.
- *Honouring the Marginalized*
  - An economy of grace recognizes that many of the marginalized and the broken are those who do not possess the grasping and aggressive nature often needed to thrive in the market arena – the ones whom Christ cherishes.

Discussion Questions

1. *Are the poor marginalized because they lack initiative* — or because they lack those qualities which would earn them a better return? Is there any rationale for saying they're marginalized due to their own fault? How would you discredit that argument?
2. *Why do some think that a grasping and aggressive nature is a virtue*, deserving of higher rewards? What personal qualities actually are deserving? Why are those qualities poorly rewarded?

Validating the Least of These

Turning the social order on its head.

Issues

- *Serving Those at the Bottom*
  - We are to give dignity to those at the bottom — respond to their needs and serve them — defend them physically and emotionally — alleviate their suffering and heal their wounds.
- *Elevating the Losers*
  - We are to elevate society's losers — the non-acquisitive personalities, the unemployable, the broken and the marginalized. We are to break the stigma of assistance and celebrate them rather than belittle them. They are children of God.

Discussion Questions

1. *In a society that looks down their noses at such people*, is this even possible? Where do we begin?
2. *Personally, is it a struggle for you* to warm up to broken people in the street? Does that mean you're failing to be compassionate?

Franciscan Noble Poverty

The Franciscan respect for poverty.

Issues

- *Embracing Poverty*
  - Francis of Assisi began his ministry by embracing a leper, following Christ's dictum with a fierce consistency. He embraced lowliness and poverty as a spiritual way of life — as a calling to express the longing for God's presence — as a blessing not a curse and a key to the mystery of Christ.
- *Practicing Simplicity*
  - Francis begged, but he did not demand that of everyone. Over time the principle emerged that Franciscans should practice a simplicity of life, ranging from frugality to outright poverty depending on the extent of their commitment.
- *Poverty is a Blessing*
  - This stands as a clear rejection of secular priorities which treat poverty as failure. Franciscans are quick to offer aid — to honour the poor. They not only heal, support, advocate and challenge — they identify with the poor and often embrace their poverty. Poverty is not failure — indeed it is a calling and a blessing.

Discussion Questions

1. *Why aren't all Franciscans asked to become beggars?* Is simplicity an adequate substitute for poverty? Or is it a cop out?
2. *How could Francis say* that poverty is a calling and a blessing?
3. *Can you see yourself* aspiring to poverty?

Indigenous Leadership from Below

The unacquisitive nature of indigenous culture.

Issues

- *They Know Poverty and Contempt*
  - Indigenous people, immersed in the history of colonization, are very sensitive to having poverty and disdain imposed upon them. They're appreciative of humble circumstances. Those who have not been broken by colonialism can resonate with those needing healing and support.
- *Disdain for Accumulation*
  - Pride of position and personal wealth are corruption and irresponsibility. The ideal leader is someone of humble stature — a spiritual person who is one with the Creator, the community and the land. Appropriation of personal wealth — the touchstone of settler culture — is a corruption of indigenous sensibilities.
- *Resonate with the Marginalized*
  - This vantage point better enables them to resonate with the marginalized and the hurting — through healing, supporting, advocating and challenging injustice — a natural expression of Franciscan values.

Discussion Questions

1. *Are pride of position and personal wealth* really corruption and irresponsibility?
2. *Are indigenous people just adapting* to their circumstances, or is there a higher calling in finding one's fulfillment in humble stature?
3. *Is it enough to empathize* with those needing healing and support without also identifying with them and standing with them?

The Call to Directed Action

Responding to the needs of those society has left out.

Issues

- *Not Enough to Give a Handout*
  - Standing with the marginalized requires more than just serving their needs when society won't. It calls us to give priority to ensuring that those at the bottom receive the resources they need to discern their calling and pursue their mission in life, leaving the well-endowed to stand in line for a change.
- *It Calls for Defending and Demanding*
  - It calls for defending their rights and demanding first consideration. It calls for redirecting resources, for establishing services and programmes, to address their needs. It calls for organizing and policy-making to give them access to resources. It calls for legal teeth put at the disposal of the oppressed and opportunities designed especially for the marginalized. It calls for demanding public responsibility, mobilizing organizations and funds and programmes in service of those at the bottom, defending the exploited and the abused, and pursuing justice.
- *It Calls for Taking a Stand*
  - Ultimately people of the spirit have to get involved also in policy change and structural change to strike at the root of power and privilege.

Discussion Questions

1. *How much do the marginalized need* in order to take their place in society, and how much do the well- endowed need to give up?
2. *If redirecting society's resources* toward human values and justice comes at the expense of economic growth — what kind of pushback can we expect? From whom?
3. *If redirecting society's resources* toward human values and justice comes at the expense of economic growth — are you on board with that?

Module VII. Denial of Justice

Capitalist Mythology

The story we're fed.

Issues

- *Justice is Automatic*
  - When the economy is working as advertised, we need not worry about justice. It happens automatically. Economists have built a mathematical fantasy called "perfect competition" and claim that it balances all markets efficiently so that everyone gets what they deserve. That is, with efficient markets, justice happens automatically — a collateral benefit — so don't worry about it.
- *Efficiency is All We Need*
  - When injustices arise from market imperfections, just make the market more perfect and it will fix itself. Any attempt to rebalance the economy is interference in the sacred marketplace.

Discussion Questions

1. *Explain how perfect competition is perfect justice*, so that even Karl Marx wouldn't complain about it.
2. *Then why isn't it good enough* just to make the market more perfect?
3. *Do you find the market economy has treated* you well? If it has, what's so bad about it?

The Problem, Not the Solution

The backstory.

Issues

- *Not As Advertised*
  - While the perfect economy may produce total justice in theory, the real-world imperfect economy produces exactly the opposite in practice — injustice. Efficient markets are the problem, not the solution.
- *Predatory Competition*
  - When markets run free, predatory competition leads to enormous market power and vast concentrations of capital that run roughshod over those they have disentitled.
- *Concentrations of Wealth*
  - The symptoms of this malaise are found in the boundless concentrations of wealth that leave much of the world in a state of destitution. The system that is touted as liberating humankind is the very system that is enslaving it.

Discussion Questions

1. *How can efficiency* be a problem?
2. *Do you feel you're a beneficiary* or a target of predatory business practices?
3. *Why do so many people believe* that an economic system that produces vast disparities of income and wealth is actually a guarantor of justice and equality?

True Justice

A broader justice.

Issues

- *Justice is Not a Gimmick*
  - An economy of grace would not fall for any automatic market fix even if it worked. Justice is not a parlour trick in an economic model.
- *Justice is a Community Project*
  - Justice is a community project where people accommodate each other's needs in loving interdependence, and where a sensitivity to each other's well-being inspires them to ensure that nobody is denied the resources to live in dignity.
- *Justice Is a Struggle*
  - People of the spirit know that justice is a hard-won relationship of accommodation and trust among people of good will. It's a building of relationships; it's a personal commitment to having each other's back; it's family. It's a struggle to counter the effects of the unholy market

Discussion Questions

1. *Why is justice about more than just* a fair distribution of goods and services?
2. *Argue the case that justice is a relationship* of caring and interdependence, not just a matter of fair trade.
3. *To what extent have you internalized* the idea that justice is just an economic balancing of the books?

Franciscan Justice

Serving those left behind.

Issues

- *Out in the World*
  - The Franciscan Order gets out in the street and deals with injustice on a daily basis — from feeding the hungry to marching with the homeless for just treatment. St. Francis began his ministry showing kindness to a leper, the ultimate outcast of his day.
- *Justice is Service and Struggle*
  - Followers of St. Francis carry on that tradition in service to the marginalized of today's society. But that they don't merely feed people. They denounce and fight the unjust structures that make them needy in the first place.

Discussion Questions

1. *How is justice in the Franciscan tradition*, a way of life more than it's just a belief?
2. I*s it realistic to seek justice*, or is feeding people all we can do?

Indigenous Justice

Leaving no one behind.

Issues

- *Original Prey*
  - Indigenous people are the original casualties of injustice of all kinds. Struggling to survive it and fighting to end it are in their blood.
- *Original Caring*
  - In spite of generations-long efforts to Europeanize them — they still cling to their values of not leaving anyone behind.
- *"We are Still Here"*
  - In colonial society, they are often the ones who are left out. As they fight to leave colonialism behind, their call for reconciliation is a call to confront injustice and give everyone a place of dignity.

Discussion Questions

1. *Not leaving anyone behind.* Is that all we need to create a just community? What about restorative justice?
2. *Is reconciliation just peacekeeping*, or is it cry for justice?

Redirecting Policy

Debunking and rescuing.

Issues

- *The Call for Debunking*
  - Perhaps the first task here is debunking the preposterous ideology at the root of our dysfunction — that efficient markets mean justice. But that's not enough.
- *The Call for Exposing*
  - People have been de-sensitized to the conditions of oppression, largely because they've been led to believe it's not really happening. And maybe it's not happening — in their back yards. A fuller and more realistic picture needs to be presented, introducing people to the facts of life and confronting them with the hidden suffering at home and abroad.
- *The Call for Policy*
  - Policies have to be turned on their head. Break the malicious myth that justice is always served by the market if only it's left free to work its magic — and start aggressively redirecting resources to those who are deeply in need. We'll know we're breaking ground when the pushback from the over-entitled becomes fierce.

Discussion Questions

1. *How have so many people been persuaded* that nobody's really oppressed? How can they be made aware that the economy is not as benign as they're led to believe?
2. *How can people be led to acknowledge* the suffering that flows from their blind affluence — out of sight out of mind — without making them feel under attack? How can we make them care?
3. *Do you personally have enough affluence* in your life that you have to reconcile it with all the oppression in the world?

Module VIII. Denial of Mother Earth

Abusing God's Garden

> The attitude that the land is just there for the taking,
> and its abuse carries no serious consequences.

Issues

- *Pile of Resources — there for the taking.*
    - The land is treated as just a pile of resources, there for the taking.
    - Conventional economics considers the land to be expendable, waiting to be exploited by humans.
- *Unconstrained Extraction.*
    - Unconstrained extraction is not harmless.
    - Resource extraction may enable economic growth, but an economy without limits tends to be unstable. Like unconstrained expansion within any container, it'll burst the container in time.
- *No Respect.*
    - Even if we rein in economic growth until it's sustainable, that's still not showing respect for the living system that is Mother Earth.
- *No Attempt.*
    - The growth imperative doesn't permit respect for Mother Earth. Economic growth dominates policy agendas.

Discussion Questions

1. *"Let them have dominion."* (Genesis) Does the Bible give us permission to strip the planet bare?
2. *Why is it so easy for people* to treat the land as a pile of dirt there for the taking?
3. *Why do people to think they can keep demanding* more and more from our economy without Mother Earth rebelling? Why is the mantra of economic growth accepted without hesitation?

No Concept of Creation Care

The lack of attention to caring for and nurturing creation,
as a human responsibility.

Issues

- *Seeking Balance*
    - We must strive to maintain the healthy balance that the ecosystem needs in order to live in a robust state.
    - We are a tiny vulnerable part of that ecosystem. We should want the whole family of Mother Earth to survive.
- *Healthy Integration*
    - We must seek a healthy integration with all those who share the land.
    - We can't thrive when all around us is in crisis. Our health as a species depends on being one with a healthy whole.
- *Nurture Mother Earth*
    - We must care for creation lovingly, with mutual compassion, respect and a nurturing spirit.
    - We must Humans will not flourish without the natural world flourishing.

Discussion Questions

1. *What is it that's out of balance?* What needs to be in balance in a healthy ecosystem?
2. *Why can't human flourishing* be separated from planetary flourishing?
3. *Why do people look away* from such an urgent need?

The Land is Holy

The need to cherish our living environment
and those with whom we share it.

Issues

- *A Moral Responsibility*
  - We must have a moral responsibility to live in love and gratitude for Mother Earth.
  - We We must respect her needs and pleasures, living a lifestyle that harmonizes with her rhythms and returns the love that creation lavishes upon us.
- *Mere Survival Not Enough*
  - To survive is not all that God has commissioned us to do.
  - We're expected to care for Mother Earth, build a relationship of mutual nurturing, and seek her forgiveness when we ask for too much.
- *Love Your Neighbour(hood)*
  - Show our respect. Show our gratitude. Show our generosity.

Discussion Questions

1. *Why isn't it good enough just to save ourselves* from self-imposed destruction — rather than nurture God's garden out of love for creation? Can we change the message?
2. *How does human behaviour* in our culture need to change to create a reverence for creation and a passion to preserve her health?

The Land is Vulnerable

We violate Mother Earth and think we have a right to do that.

Issues

- *A Threat to Viability*
    - Resources are not viable when exploited beyond recovery without constraint or oversight.
    - An environment is not stable when industrial spillovers are left to run wild with no regulation.
    - Both constitute abuse of the delicate creature that is Earth. A culture of stripping and fowling the land has no future.
- *Economic Apologists*
    - Apologists for economics say that people are autonomous individuals, beholden to no one, with the right to take whatever we want — and nature is just there to give it all to us.
    - They've convinced us that it's proper behaviour to take all we can to satisfy our sacred human appetites.
    - Nature is there for the raping.
- *Challenging Immoral Narratives*
    - Most people aren't well enough informed to address economic and ecological technicalities.
    - Yet many people have a good sense of society's moral failings which lie at the root of widespread abuse of the land.

Discussion Questions

1. *Some would say we're romanticizing the land* when we fancy it to be "Mother Earth". Can a pile of dirt really be abused? Is it delusional to anthropomorphize the land?
2. *Economists say we're autonomous individuals* with the right to use resources as we see fit, if we can manage the reserves we extract and the spillovers we generate. Is it ok to bend creation to our wills in order to satisfy our every appetite, as long as we throw in a little regulation?
3. *Is there any prospect* of reversing a mindset of impunity that is ingrained into us from day one?

Franciscan Reverence for Creation

Franciscans identify with the entire family of God, from the earth beneath our feet to all the creatures that live upon it.

Issues

- *Franciscans Stand with Creation*
  - Creation is a system that extends far beyond the reach of humans, and has a significance we can only vaguely imagine.
  - It's impossible to think of one's individual fulfillment apart from the integrity of the whole.
- *No Mere Environmentalists*
  - We diminish Franciscans if we just see them as environmentalists.
  - They're lovers of the great spirit of Mother Earth.
  - St. Francis celebrated "brother dirt".
  - He and his followers lived and live in reverence of creation — all of it.
- *The Larger Life*
  - Franciscans strive to live the larger life of the whole of creation, as mere creatures among creatures — and revere the health and beauty of the larger body that is more than just us.
  - They call on us all to live in reverence of God's work of art, and show our worship in our daily stewardship of His magnificent creation.

Discussion Questions

1. *Is it stretching things a bit* to pray for "brother dirt"?
2. *Do you really view yourself* as part of the whole, a ripple in creation? Does that make you unimportant?
3. *What do you need to do differently* on a daily basis to be a truer steward of creation?

The Land is Family

Indigenous people seek harmony with all our relations in all of creation.

Issues

- One With the Land
    - Indigenous people embody the principle of being one with the land, and being but one among the Great Spirit's creatures.
    - Hunting other creatures but asking their forgiveness is a natural tradition.
    - Walking on the earth leaving no damage behind is in their blood.
- *All Our Relations*
    - We must honour all our relations who live in the land, sea or sky — with a respect for all forms of life — from family to community to all creatures and to all of creation.
- *Resisting Corruption*
    - Settlers have tried to corrupt them with their exploitative values, but only to limited effect.
    - Some of them are drawn in by alien values and broken. We pray for their healing.
    - Others stand proudly with their Creator, accepting all of creation as family and striving for the larger harmony.

Discussion Questions

1. *Why do some indigenous hunters ask forgiveness* from their prey? In what other ways can we seek our one-ness with creation?
2. *How do we carry the indigenous tradition* of "walk lightly on Mother Earth" over to a jaded population? What are we asking them to give up?
3. *How do we carry the indigenous perspective* of "all my relations" over to a freakishly individualistic population? Can they really change?

Rein in the Mindset

A culture of exploitation and destruction, which threatens the well-being of creation itself, needs to be discredited and healed.

Issues

- Violating God's Garden
    - Economic culture violating God's garden to satisfy our rapacious consumption is an aberration that will be hard to turn around.
    - We aren't even fully on board with preventing our own self-destruction — let alone nurturing creation.
    - Our self-indulgence and our tendency to self-delusion have sunk in deeply over the centuries.
- *Recapture the Mindset*
    - We have to control that obsessive consumer mindset that infects our economic culture and threatens the ecology that once used to nurture us.
    - We do have to work on carbon control and other measures to seek a little stability — but not to distract us from the sin of desecrating God's creation.
- *Seek Holy Ground*
    - We have to treat the earth as holy ground again, which we are charged to nurture. We're not going to do that without resurrecting a reverence for Mother Earth. We need to take some cues from indigenous leadership.

Discussion Questions

1. *Is the aberration of rapacious living curable?* How can centuries of self-delusion and self-indulgence be turned around?
2. *How can we make the land sacred again?* It is enough in a benumbed society to remind people that she's "Mother Earth"? How drastic need we be?
3. *Will the Earth ever be* God's Holy Garden again?

Module IX. Denial of Entitlement

This is *Section IX* of the broader workbook called
Radical Grace and the Economy

Appropriation at All Levels

Disentitlement and colonialism.

Issues

- *Everyone is Entitled*
    - Everyone is entitled to a place to call home, a community to call family, a role in which to live one's calling with dignity, the means to rise to life's challenges, and a path to the spirit which gives us life.
- *Colonial Appropriation*
    - But in the culture we have inherited, only commodities matter and power rules. The world economy colonizes so many of us at all levels — appropriating the land of nature's children, cancelling communities and cultures, imposing roles and identities, and corrupting the spirit.

Discussion Questions

1. The only kind of entitlement that exists in a market economy comes from property ownership. Isn't that enough? Why should anyone be guaranteed a home when land is freely available in the marketplace?
2. How can anyone take away someone else's community? Or their lifestyle? Or their religion?

The Big Land Grab

The doctrine of discovery strikes again.

Issues

- *It Warn't Theirs*
    - The concept of a colony was drawn from the supposition that uncivilized people in the new territories were inferior people, incapable of using their land and resources properly — and were therefore not fully entitled to ownership.
- *Learning Too Late*
    - And the fact that these uncivilized people were not initially familiar with foreign concepts of property entitlement allowed the invaders to think that nothing significant was being taken from them. Indigenous tribes did have the concept of treaty though, and soon realized there was a land grab going on.
- *Uphill Struggle*
    - But they were at a disadvantage in negotiations — facing superior weapons, unscrupulous tactics and their unfamiliarity with legal technicalities. Treaties took shape, which often took the form of swindles.

Discussion Questions

1. What entitlement did indigenous people have to their traditional lands if they had no deeds of ownership? What entitlement did the colonizers have?
2. Why would a "superior civilization" think that they're free to take the land by decree, or by force, or by swindle? What justifications did they use?

It's Not Just About Land

Grabbing everything but the kitchen sink.

Issues

- *Not Just Land Theft*
    - Colonialism is not limited to land and resources. It involves any instance where one group of people wants another group of people displaced and made to conform — because the invading group wants to take over their space and discredit their way of life. Here we identify three types:

        - Appropriating Community Space
            - Invading cultures do not accept as legitimate those ways of social organization they deem inappropriate — and strive to displace it with "civilized" culture.

Discussion Question

1. *Why did settlers think they had the right* to disentitle indigenous culture? Did they see how rapacious they were being, or did they feel they were just offering something better out of a sense of mission? Were indigenous communities that threatening?

        - Appropriating Personal Space
            - The dominant society dictates acceptable roles and behaviours, allowable types of relationships, and approved personal identities on people whose own ways of life have served them well.

Discussion Questions

1. *Which other alternative ways of living* in 21st century domestic colonialism face pressure to conform or be disentitled? What forms does this cancel culture take?
2. *How are suppression* of the LGBT community, and patriarchy, forms of colonialism?

- Appropriating Spiritual Space
  - Arbiters of the spirit want to confine worship into narrow ways and approved practices, leaving no space for individuals and communities to follow their own path to the Holy Spirit. The modern church needs decolonization as much as any other institution.

Discussion Question

1. *Is spiritual colonialism over and done with*, or are those hungry for the spirit still channeled into prescribed forms of worship?

The Franciscan Mission

Standing up for the disentitled and restoring holy gifts.

Issues

- *Stand Up and Serve*
    - The Franciscan impulse is to stand up for the disentitled and stand up to any unjust appropriating that marginalizes them. But not until first serving their needs.
- *Gifts of the Holy Spirit*
    - Franciscans recognize that all contested spaces are gifts of the Holy Spirit, and no one has the right to deny them to anybody.
- *Nothing Colonial*
    - Nothing colonial, nothing that is appropriation, belongs in God's kingdom where grace and gratuitous relations are the norm. And where such abominations are found, they are to be challenged.

Discussion Question

1. *How can Franciscans say that everyone is entitled* to a home, a community and dignity when these are all gifts from God? How can they be taken away or given back?

Taking It All

Living the Creator's way.

Issues

- *Appropriating Creator's Land*
  - When settlers arrived, indigenous people encountered invaders laying individual claim to land that belonged to the Creator — an alien concept. *To the intruders*, the land not only didn't belong to the Creator, but neither did it belong to those who had stewarded it for generations. It was there for the taking, or the swindling.
- *Denigrating Creator's Children*
  - But colonial appropriation did not end with the land. Indigenous communities were dismissed as primitive and they were expected to emulate the culture of the invaders. Their own relationships and culture were vilified and suppressed. Their spiritual sensibilities were dismissed as pagan.
- *Bullying Ways*
  - Few knew colonial bullying like the indigenous peoples. But they still hang onto their values of inclusiveness today.

Discussion Questions

1. *Who does the land really belong to?* To the Creator alone? To the people who have lived on it and nurtured it for millennia? Or to private individuals?
2. *What is the rationale for private ownership?* Why is that so sacred to some? How alien is that to indigenous peoples?
3. *Why were indigenous people also pushed* to give up their culture and their communities? In modern times, have we all given up our culture and our communities to commercial colonization?
4. *Why do some indigenous communities* go by the slogan — "We are still here!"?

Colonialism Today

Colonialism goes wholesale.

Issues

- *Exclusion of Land*
    - Colonial values of exclusion remain strong in modern culture. Land is reduced to a commodity and land developers routinely push aside community aspirations in pursuit of private gain.
- *Ways of Life*
    - While claiming to strive for inclusiveness, mainstream culture disapproves of certain ways of living and discriminates against them, leaving people vulnerable to abuses of power and position. Vast swaths of people are denied the necessities of life if they don't possess the abilities or the values or the mental health to join the grasping commercial merry-go-round.
- *Approved Channels*
    - While claiming to be free thinkers, mainstream spirituality (or lack thereof) channels believers into standard templates of worship, relegating more innovative thinkers to the margins if not out the door.

Discussion Questions

1. *Why have the descendants of settlers* yielded to colonial values while indigenous people have hung on to their traditional ways?
2. *Why are colonial aberrations like patriarchy* so firmly implanted in the mainstream psyche while they have failed to take such strong root in indigenous culture?
3. *What kinds of alternative lifestyles* are suppressed in modern times? Why are so many people denied homes and other necessities of life?

The Call to Decolonize

Taking us beyond the mindset.

Issues

- *A Discredited Mindset*
  - How do we challenge an ingrained mind-set that is centuries old? Well, there are certain forms of exclusion that have lost their appeal. The original form of colonialism, the appropriation of land, has a bad reputation in modern times largely due to historical excesses. Currently the idea of condemning people for their lifestyles is coming under fire as challenges mount.
- *A Social Movement*
  - A social movement toward inclusive culture is gaining some critical mass, though regressive social movements are also growing. A smooth transition to greater tolerance is not guaranteed, and confrontation threatens.
- *A Peaceful Call*
  - The call must be for peaceful growth of enlightened behaviour, of inclusive standards, at every level where modern forms of the colonial mentality still persist — and issuing more serious challenges where needed. Combine that with the Franciscan tradition of serving the marginalized and the indigenous tradition of living as family in community, and the culture of appropriation may have to back off.

Discussion Questions

1. *Is the old colonialism dead?* What is the new colonialism and what forms does it take? Are we making progress in counteracting its modern forms?
2. *What kinds of pushback* do we face when we fight for inclusion? How do we encourage more enlightened behaviour? Will we have to fight fire with fire?
3. *How can Franciscans and Indigenous peoples* be leaders in this quest?

Author of this workbook:
Canon Dr. Gary Russell
Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Rupert's Land
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
The Society of St. Francis (TSSF), Anglican Franciscan Order